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COGNITIVE PERCEPTION OF “I” DENTITY IN SALMAN RUSHDIE’S “MIDNIGHT’S CHILDREN”

M. Thenmozhi* and Sarika Gupta Tyagi

School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract

This paper emphasizes the multiplicity of the protagonist Saleem’s identity which is paralleled with the multiplicity of the Nation. In “Midnight’s Children”, the theme of illegitimacy in the private lives constitutes the concept of the multiculturalism. Narrator Saleem is born of Vinita, a Hindu wife of a magician singer by an Englishman, Methwold and nourished by Muslim parents. Thus, he is a mixture of world religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Metaphorically the narrator is endowed with plural identities and stands for post-colonial India. The major concern of Rushdie’s novel is the part independent India obviously plays in the story of the birth and upbringings of Saleem Sinai, which runs parallel to the story of the development of a newly independent nation. The hard situation of a nation is equalized through the sufferings of birth, tantrums of childhood, the anxiety of adolescence and the adulthood.

Keywords: Independent India, Suffering, Tantrum and Nation.

“Midnight’s Children” is a novel about Indian nation. There are dynamic appearances of cities like Bombay, Srinagar, Amritsar, Delhi, Karachi and Dacca. The Novel regains the part memories and thus the novel is a novel of memory according to Salman Rushdie. He portrays the country with diverse languages, customs and cultures.

Rushdie’s emphasis is more on the city of Bombay, the city of seven islands. So he has given the historical and geographical sketch of Bombay. Especially ‘kolynos toothpaste’ in fashion then, makes its appearance in the pages of the novel. India has been divided a new, into fourteen states and six centrally administered territories. But the boundaries of these states were not formed by rivers or mountains or any natural features of the

terrains; they were walls of words. Language divided us; Kerala was for speakers of Malayalam. In Karnataka you were supposed to speak Kanarese (MC 335).

Salman Rushdie started his narration from the past, about the paradise of Kashmir to Amritsar in 1919. Aadam Aziz passes through various situations. He is connected with every aspect in the march of India’s history. His separation from Kashmir coincides with Adam’s separation from the Garden of Eden. On the midnight of 15th August 1947, they give birth to a child which coincides with the birth of our liberated India from the British rule. The switched babies coincided with the switched power from the British to an independent India. The growing baby Saleem underwent lots of struggle which blended with the struggle of the nation.

Saleem, the self-conscious narrator oscillates between the past and the present, the historical and the personal, the apocalyptic and the expansion. Throughout the novel Saleem’s inner life is a function of the historical forces affecting

*Corresponding author: **M. Thenmozhi**

Tel.: +919994069694

E-mail: thenmozhi.nisha@vit.ac.in

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his state. Saleem's literally disintegrating and fissured body from which history pours out is a possible allusion to the underlying political fragmentation of Indian politics, past and present.

Rushdie has narrated and referred to these events and their real and imaginary relationships with Saleem, his family and the midnight's children. Saleem is linked to his history by different modes of connection, through relationships, both literal and metaphorical. Like the other midnight's children, he is a metaphor of the Indian society and the very essence of multiplicity constantly haunted by the phantasm of the partitioned man, "broken creature spilling pieces of itself into the street"(MC 152)

It is Saleem's fear of coming-to-nothing that suggests India's socio-political stagnation, individually and collectively. India will forever repeat history. If the country and its people persist in murdering hope, ideological dreaming and childhood, the nation will continue to be divided by conflict and strife. It will continue to battle its neighbours and neighbourhoods, always coming to nothing, always cyclic and not linear, always reliving the past.

At the end of the novel Rushdie leaves us on a more comforting note, emphasizing that a new generation like his son, will subvert the prejudices of India's national divisions. "Already he is stronger, harder, more resolute than I" (MC 430). Hopefully, the future generations will carry what was missing from Saleem. Saleem has been so many, too many persons within his lifetime, each distinct personality soundly co-existing within his primary self. Throughout, he has identified his sub-personalities, owned them and integrated them into who he was, who he is and who he will become (Mohit 13).

In "Midnight's Children", the theme of illegitimacy in the private lives constitutes the concept of the multiculturalism. Narrator Saleem is born of Vinita, a Hindu wife of a magician singer by an Englishman, Methwold and nourished by Muslim parents. Thus he is a mixture of world

religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Metaphorically the narrator is endowed with plural identities and stands for post-colonial India. He is a character fully realized in the complexities of his identity, cognitively aware of the multiplicity of selves with his grated 'I'. Saleem many identities allow him to understand that, the self has no boundaries except those it accepts out of ignorance (Robert 4).

At the heights of self-estrangement, Saleem looks at himself as only the broken bits and fragments of his former self. I am tearing myself apart, can't even agree with myself talking and arguing like a wild fellow, cracking up, memory going, yes, memory plunging into chasms and being swallowed by the dark only fragments remain, none of it makes sense anymore. (MC 503)

"Saleem Sinai", observes Kathleen Flanagan sees himself as a part of society, not a detached min-reader at its centre. The self of Saleem Sinai undergoes a metamorphosis from being a character whose consciousness as a child and young man determines his whole existence, to being a character whose social existence determines his vision of the world. (Common Wealth Novel In English 44). "But sociohistorical forces crush him down and his private lives reduced to specs of voiceless dist" (MC 152). Thus, Saleem sees himself as a vulnerable part of society.

On a similar level, India's divided nation needs to exist, recognize and accept its multiplicity, and its numerous social, political, religious and linguistic marks. Only then India can function as a healthy nation. This interplay of the personal and national histories gives the narrative a shape and a sense of unity to the novel. The metaphoric consciousness of history, awareness of oneself as a blend of past and present, makes operates on a grander scale than any individual.

The harmonious collision and fusion of the nation and domestic history throws in to focus many related themes of the narrative such as secularism, nation growth and development, decency and



morality in public life. The main focus is on realizing India as a nation, in its historical and political perspective with the individual history.

However, despite the sense of despair, the journey from wholeness to fragment, the novel ends on a note of hope rather than political one. As the narrative progresses, the disintegration becomes quicker and quicker. With his final words the disintegrating Saleem prophesies his fate and articulates the post colonial condition of the generation of Midnight's Children.

My poor body, Singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much history, has started coming apart at the seams. In short I am literally disintegrating slowly for the moment.... I shall eventually crumble into six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous and oblivious dust (MC37).

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